

(SCHAUMBURG, Ill.) January 25, 2010 – The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) today announced its support of newly introduced federal legislation that will help bolster the nation's supply of veterinarians specializing in the care of wildlife and zoo animals.

The Wildlife and Zoological Veterinary Medicine Enhancement Act, introduced January 21 by U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., will fill a critical need in protecting the country's animals, environment and its people.

"This is absolutely needed," said AVMA Chief Executive Officer W. Ron DeHaven, DVM. "If passed, this legislation will strengthen curriculum in our veterinary schools. It will create opportunities for our veterinary graduates to work in the areas in which they have studied, and it will protect both animals and people."

The bipartisan legislation aims to build the country's cadre of wildlife and zoo veterinarians on several fronts. It will create new funded positions for specialized veterinarians in both clinical and research settings. It will help reduce the amount of educational debt veterinary students amass during their education. It will help veterinary schools develop curriculum specializing in health management of wildlife in their natural habitat and in captivity. And it expands the number of educational and training programs in wildlife and zoological medicine for veterinary students.

"The AVMA commends Congressman Hastings and his staff for championing legislation that could revolutionize the practice of wildlife and zoological medicine," said Mark Lutschaunig, DVM, director of the AVMA's Governmental Relations Division in Washington, D.C. "Zoo and wildlife veterinarians play an important role working at the intersection of animal, human and environmental health, as many emerging diseases are spread from animals to humans. The Wildlife and Zoological Veterinary Medicine Enhancement Act of 2010 insures that our country will have a sufficient number of veterinarians trained to deal with zoo and wildlife populations."

The legislation also has the support of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges, the American Association of Zoological Veterinarians, the American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians and the National Association of Federal Veterinarians.

Each of the supporting groups cites a lack of wildlife veterinary positions with state, tribal, and federal wildlife resource agencies, as well as in research positions at universities and nongovernmental organizations, as a primary reason the legislation is needed.

“We need to grow the workforce, and the veterinary students with a desire to practice in the fields of wildlife and zoo veterinary medicine need to get the experience necessary in disease research, surveillance, prevention and treatment,” DeHaven said. “This legislation will help make that possible.”

Joining Rep. Hastings as original cosponsors of the legislation are representatives Madeleine Bordallo, D-Guam; Henry Brown, R-S.C.; Donna Christensen, D-V.I.; and Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz.

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The AVMA and its more than 80,000 member veterinarians are engaged in a wide variety of activities dedicated to advancing the science and art of animal, human and public health. Visit the AVMA Web site at www.avma.org to learn more about veterinary medicine and animal care.

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